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Army buckles down to reduce losses

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FORT RUCKER, Ala. (May 18, 2007)—Every year the Army loses Soldiers not only to combat-related injuries but also to vehicle accidents, both on- and off- duty vehicle accidents.

In effort to reduce these losses, Army installations across the globe are joining state and local law enforcement and highway safety officials in the nationwide Click It or Ticket campaign.

The goal of the campaign is to raise awareness of the importance of wearing seat belts. The campaign begins this month and concludes on June 3.

This year's initiative involves an aggressive seat belt enforcement mobilization that will crack down on low seat belt use and in an attempt to reduce highway fatalities with a new emphasis on convincing more motorists to buckle up – day and night.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, regular seat belt use is the single most effective way to protect drivers and passengers and reduce fatalities in motor vehicle crashes. In 2005, 77 percent of passenger vehicle occupants who were buckled up in a serious crash survived it. When worn correctly, seat belts have proven to reduce the risk of fatal injury to front-seat passenger car occupants by 45 percent (by 60 percent in pickup trucks, sport utility vehicles and minivans).

However, some Soldiers don't perceive seat belts as a convenience. A Soldier wearing full "battle-rattle" might not fit comfortably into a HMMWV seat, especially on a patrol mission. But seat belts have been proven to save lives even in combat situations.

Recently in Afghanistan, while driving a 5-Ton wrecker with two other Soldiers, the driver hit a bump in the road with the vehicle causing it to flip. All three Soldiers were ejected from the vehicle. None of the occupants were wearing seat belts, and two of the Soldiers died as a result of their injuries.

A separate situation involved a Soldier driving at 3:00 a.m. in Texas. After losing control of his privately owned vehicle, it flipped three times. Because he wasn't wearing his seat belt, he too was thrown from the vehicle and died from injuries sustained in the accident.

According to the Office of the Provost Marshal General, traffic fatalities during the summer months involve three distinctive factors; excessive speed, lack of seat belt use, and alcohol/drug use. Since these contributing factors are well known, most installation provost marshal offices and Directorate of Emergency Services Traffic Accident Investigation sections focus on conducting selective enforcement techniques. A few examples include use of unmarked patrol vehicles, random safety/DUI/DWI checkpoint at various locations, and increasing TAI patrols during high-peak traffic times such as weekends, rush hour and holidays.

Installations also support campaign year-round with other program and initiatives. Fort Hood, Texas, posts wrecked vehicles adjacent to its gates to deliver a valuable seat belt message to the majority of its motorists; while Fort Stewart, Ga. has posted large billboard-size slogans and safety messages along its main roads.

For more driving and POV information, visit the USACRC Web site at <https://crc.army.mil/DrivingPOV>.

For more information on the National Click It or Ticket campaign visit <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>.